

## **Globalization and Liberal Education – Opportunities for Convergence**

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Globalization – and the backlash against it – will be a megatrend of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Absent some profound global disruption, such as a global economic collapse, military conflict between large states or a pandemic comparable to the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919, globalization - that is, multiple processes that increase global interdependence, including the liberalization of trade, the spread of technology and the emergence of a global culture - will continue. At this point, neither the global recession following the banking collapse of 2008 nor the H1N1 pandemic of 2009 are likely to threaten this larger process.

This process may not continue at the pace of the 1990's, the first post Cold War decade, but it will continue and will increasingly influence life in such large nations as China, India and Russia. The backlash against globalization will also be real and politically important. There is no question that the attacks of September 11, 2001, the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the continuing insurgencies in both countries have brought strong nationalist feelings to the surface of global politics. In the US, the daily barrage of anti-globalization rhetoric on such programs as Lou Dobbs's evening telecast on CNN, testifies to a large audience in the very country that drives globalization hardest. This tension, of course, is part of what makes globalization both interesting and important.

Globalization may represent, as Peter Scott, Vice Chancellor of Kingston University in London, has claimed "the most fundamental challenge faced by the University in its long history." The history of the contemporary university, Scott argues, lies not in the benign, ascetic medieval era, but rather in the nationalistic competition of 19<sup>th</sup> century state imperialism and Cold War science. These twin pillars are not ideal foundations in the era of globalization, which is almost by definition subversive of traditional national prerogatives and the hierarchy of status and knowledge. Moreover, the short shelf life of knowledge itself in a highly technological age plays into these extra-university modes of knowledge production and distribution. The "economy" of the university linking undergraduate, professional and graduate research

education/training – and, it must be added, tenure - may not be viable in a world of distributed learning, new technologies, faculty with more of a stake in the intellectual property of their course syllabi than in their university allegiance. The glue of institutionalization is weaker than before, compounded by the growing denationalization of higher education in general.

But the university has a unique advantage in an age of globalization. It can study it! Colleges and universities can focus student attention on understanding and acting in a globalized world. Even if campus internationalization is in the long run a passing educational fashion, globalization will be a very real fact for us and for our students for the indefinite future.

But how can the study of globalization be relevant to liberal education today?

In the much-neglected conclusion to Thomas Friedman's **The Lexus and the Olive Tree** (1999, 359ff.), the author proposes a *Rapid Change Opportunity Act* to deal with the human displacement that globalization inevitably creates. For higher education, doesn't this process also call for a *Rapid Change Curriculum*? If so, what should this curriculum look like? How does it converge with other models of liberal education? Of course, the most common university response will be to add a course or two on globalization – most likely in the social sciences or business – and leave it at that. A stronger response may be to develop new majors or certificates as at the University of California at San Diego and the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee (Global Studies majors) or the University of Pittsburgh (Global Competence certificate). Or one may develop parallel programs to enhance traditional majors (as at Oregon State University and the University of Technology Sydney). However successful in terms of faculty commitment and student enrollment, these initiatives all represent minimalist approaches to international education in a global era.

There is an even greater opportunity. This is the opportunity to take advantage of a powerful convergence between the processes of globalization and the overall structure of liberal (or general) education. At the undergraduate level, globalization thus poses – or at least supports and helps frame – the enduring critical thinking goals that all educators hope to develop in their students. They could even be formulated as benchmark courses/seminars in a globally focused curriculum for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What

would such courses look like? How can this unique “teachable moment” be converted into a new kind of learning.

**Global Education 101: What is the nature of historical change?** This freshman-level course raises key questions about continuity and discontinuity in history. Is today’s globalization something new? Has history somehow moved faster since the great advances in global communication at the end of the nineteenth century? How do we perceive change from one generation to another?

This course builds on what is being called “the new global history,” a rapidly growing body of both conceptual and empirical work that emphasizes the global dimension of human affairs. There is obviously a very long tradition to this kind of writing, going back to Arnold Toynbee (1934ff.) in the first half of the last century and to William McNeill (1976), Daniel Boorstin (1983) and Theodore Von Laue (1969, 1987) (just to name some notable American writers) in the second half. But what is even more striking is the success of recent works by such authors as Jared Diamond (1999), Amy Chua (2003) and Mark Kurlansky (2002) – to name but a few representative authors – writing on topics as diverse as disease, diasporas and salt.

But Globalization 101 can now draw on some themes in the course first taught at Harvard in 2001-2002 by Profs. Bruce Mazlish (MIT) and Akira Iriye (Harvard), which they titled “New Global History: An Introduction.” (See also the related website [www.newglobalhistory.com](http://www.newglobalhistory.com), whose goal is “to advance understanding of the multi-faceted dimensions of globalization processes.”) One may also build on David Christian’s “Big History” freshman course at San Diego State University in California ([http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/histweb/course\\_syllabi/index.htm](http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/histweb/course_syllabi/index.htm)). These key themes include periodization, migration, transcontinentalism and technology. And the first of these is periodization.

Our students must learn a new periodization – or at the very least a new extension of what is in the standard history texts. When did the acceleration of change and the integration of global processes come together to mark a new human era? This leads to the debate over whether Globalization I (as Thomas Friedman calls it) covers roughly the period 1500 – 1800; Globalization II the period 1800-2000; Globalization III (as Friedman now asserts in *The World is Flat* (2005) from 2000. (Friedman loves the

dramatic, and again he claims that a new epoch has just begun - recall “The World is Ten Years Old,” the Opening Scene of *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*.) Now, according to Friedman, the world is just *ten* years old! Of course, one can look at “modern” history differently. Bruce Mazlish (2005) would date the first true era of globalization from the 1970’s. The McNeills (2003) date the origins of what they call “The Cosmopolitan Web” about 1870 and the current era of globalization since about 1980. Sociologist Roland Robertson (1992) suggests we may now be in a new era of “global uncertainty” marked by the advent of AIDS and other global diseases, environmental threats, religious fundamentalism, global terrorism, global media and polyethnicity. Whatever their differences, these authors all agree that something qualitatively new has been happening over the past 30-40 years, that is, over the past generation.

Why are these schemes of historical periodization important?

How we look at change – and the scale of change – is fundamental to understanding who we are and where we are situated in the larger processes of history. One characteristic of a liberally educated person is surely that this person can place himself or herself in the universe and in the course of human (not just US) history – what David Christian calls a “modern creation story.” The historical processes we associate with globalization may be captured in the key concepts/terms introduced in this course (part of the vocabulary of globalization that liberally educated graduates should know): Colombian exchange, decolonization, demographic transition, slavery, silk road, standard time, Earth Summit (Rio), foreign assistance, geographic determinism, gold standard, hegemony, information age, Marshall Plan, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, Kennedy Round/Uruguay Round, migration/diaspora, Monsoon exchange, transcontinentalism, Asian Financial Crisis (1997), United Nations Organization.

But to make this course more meaningful to undergraduate students, an exercise focused on their own grandparents’ and/or parents’ perceptions of change – tracing, for example, the impact of transportation or communication technology – would be included. The course would thus explore both the larger global trends that do indeed affect individual lives across the planet, but it will also test these views against the experience of real individuals whose lives span the past 100 years or so.

**Global Education 202: How do we measure big processes in human affairs?** This course at the sophomore level addresses issues of judgment in the value of various kinds of sources and measures (statistics, government reports, NGO calls for action, etc.) regarding change in the modern world. Does globalization lead to greater equality or inequality? This fundamental question in evaluating the impact of globalization focuses on the different measures one might bring to bear on the question, their credibility and interpretation.

Measuring the impacts of globalization is a complex challenge and one that is part of making sense of the myriad sources of information that is itself a feature of a globalized world. The *Economist* has conducted a running debate on the issue of equality/inequality for some years. The editorial sympathies of the *Economist* are quite obvious (April 26, 2001), but the data and commentary they present pose crucial questions for the future. The challenge is to see this issue in economic, historical, political and human terms. Jared Diamond has been at the center of some of this discussion, especially for his very successful book (now a National Geographic television series) *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (1999). Diamond's deterministic view explains inequality in terms of very large historical, geographical, ecological and cultural forces reaching back to the domestication of animals. But the challenge for today's students may be more about how to understand inequality in their world, in the era of globalization.

One focus of Globalization 202 might be the *gini coefficient*. The gini coefficient is a measure of inequality developed by Andrea Boltho of Oxford University and Gianni Toniolo of the University of Rome (Wolf 2004, 150). Basically it measures inequality as a frequency distribution of, for example, personal income. Robert Wade (2001), a professor of political economy at the London School of Economics, has made much of a World Bank calculation using the gini coefficient of a sharp rise in global income inequality since the later 1980's. But other analyses of the same data reveal different conclusions. The *Economist*, for example, suggests that the same data could lead to the conclusion that those large populations that lag in terms of wages (Africa, rural China, rural India) are victims not of globalization but rather of a *lack* of globalization.

The lessons from this exercise are several: Be cautious about the data – even World Bank data. Be cautious about drawing causal inferences. Determine what matters most – in this case, the absolute numbers of persons in poverty worldwide (which is clearly growing), the percentage of those living in poverty (which is clearly declining), or the gap between rich and poor (which is probably increasing)? The recent discussion of African poverty and how to confront it, offers particularly useful examples because of the intertwined issues of colonization/decolonization, corruption, inequalities within countries, tariff policies and cultural hegemony.

Some of the key concepts/terms introduced in this course include: AIDS, avian flu, baby-boom generation, child labor, Club of Rome, CNN, Moore's Law, supply chain management, ethnonationalism, global terrorism, Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), principle of comparative advantage, Davos World Economic Forum, crony capitalism/kleptocracy, carrying capacity, dumping, emerging markets, NEPAD, World Health Organization, World Trade Organization. Among many official sources, students should become familiar with the *Global Trends* series published every few years (1997, 2000, 2004) by the National Intelligence Council, a group of experts both inside and outside the US intelligence community charged with strategic thinking about global "drivers."

**Global Education 303: What are the guideposts for ethical action in a global age?** This upper-level course/junior seminar addresses the issue of ethical action in an era of globalization. The role of ethics in liberal education has gained increasing salience in recent years as a counterbalance to the increasing vocational interests of students and of the publicity of hugely unethical practices in the corporate, governmental, medical, academic and scientific worlds – the worlds that most of our graduates will join. Part of the interest in ethics, no doubt, stems also from the more traditional religious background of first-generation university students, which now represent the majority of those enrolled worldwide. Hence the active discussions in liberal education circle these days about the role of "spirituality" in the liberal arts curriculum.

But how can ethical issues be brought into focus through a continuing study of globalization?

One of the distinguishing features of liberal education as it has been practiced in the US is the emphasis on citizenship. In most other countries with highly developed university systems, it has been assumed that education for citizenship belongs to earlier phases of education or to the “private” sphere entirely. (One of the effects of globalization is that this divergence between the US practice and the rest of the world is narrowing.) This course would focus on such debates as that featured in an important recent article by Eve Stoddard and Grant Cornwell in *Liberal Education* (2003) in which they argue for an ethics of “overlapping consensus,” what they see as an emerging “geoethics of citizenship.” Their point is that neither Kantian universalism nor postmodern relativism is adequate to the era of globalization. “This consensus avoids epistemological and metaphysical rationales and works toward pragmatic agreements about what kinds of rights inhere in humanity as such, or more realistically, which kinds of abuses will not be tolerated.” *Multi-perspectivalism* and the *triangulation* of information (the GPS metaphor seems fitting) are keys to making ethical judgments in a global era.

International service-learning, which is experiencing a boom in the US, may well be a vehicle to bring these various elements together and to focus study abroad more sharply on acting ethically in a concrete, non-US setting. Service-learning’s emphasis on *reflection* as a vital part of the experience abroad makes the difference. Study abroad typically helps students become *aware* of cultural differences and different public policy outcomes, but it rarely leads to the kind of self-reflection that produces ethical judgments and action (Brill 1998, 94). Intercultural communication skills, the *sine qua non* of international service learning, are “essential to build a complex account of what is the case and what it is important to do.”

The role of ethics in globalization requires a full hearing of globalization skeptics and outright anti-globalization voices – including such diverse authors as George Soros (2002), Joseph Stiglitz (2002), Amy Chua (2003), Alan Tonelson (2000) and Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith (1996). These perspectives present globalization in the context of issues of social justice from the perspective of both third and first world workers and from the standpoints of a global actor/financier/philanthropist, environmental activist, a lawyer and World Bank and national policymaker. These sources present powerful case studies that do not

make newspaper headlines but that reveal the unintended consequences of national policy, cultural resentments and economic dominance.

But globalization must often be made local for it to be meaningful to our students. The often-cited trip to the clothes retailer (now the coffee shop and fish department of the grocery store as well) reveals the global economy in very real terms. To make this issue more relevant to the local situation of students (say, in Virginia), one might pose the following problem: “You are the CEO of an apparel manufacturing company in Abbingdon, Virginia. Apparel industry workers in Virginia have been losing their jobs as production is moved to Mexico. Profit margins have been cut sharply in the past five years, and your company is now facing the decision of whether to transfer production to Mexico, make a final round of lay-offs or close your plants in Virginia. You arrange for a Town Hall meeting involving representatives of labor at your Virginia plants, the local communities involved, Mexican labor, apparel retailers and political leaders in Virginia. What is your opening statement to this assemblage?” It might be noted that in my state of Virginia one could pose comparable globalization dilemmas with regard to peanuts and tobacco.

Some of the key concepts/terms introduced in this course include: debt forgiveness, Amnesty International, Sierra Club, Oxfam, Greens, Battle of Seattle, Biodiversity Convention, digital divide, Direct Action Network, Doctors without Borders, endangered species, ethnic cleansing, Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, G-8, G-21, Genetically Modified Organisms, global terrorism, global warming, Greenpeace, intellectual property rights, International Court of Justice, maquiladora, market-dominant minority, neoliberalism, NIMBY, North-South dialogue, hard/soft power, shock therapy, superempowered individuals, sweatshops, Microcredit Finance Corporation, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, weapons of mass destruction, World Watch, pre-emption, blogosphere.

**Global Education 404: How can we understand and help solve a truly global problem – all of which are interdisciplinary, cross-national and culturally sensitive?** This upper-level course/senior seminar requires students to bring their previous years of liberal education and skill building to bear on an important global problem. Does globalization inexorably erode the environmental and resource base of sustainable

development? Does globalization lead to the extinction of local cultures? Does globalization raise the problem of invisible powers (e.g., WTO, World Bank, global crime syndicates, global diseases) and how to control them?

I won't go into specific examples of global problems that might be studied in this course. In any case, this course would be much more focused on individual student (or group) research. Students would be expected to bring to bear on the problem their major course of study, their linguistic skills, their experiences abroad and their cross-cultural skills. An inspiring example of this is the commentary by a US college student who wrote of how his international experience and liberal education has motivated him to "get to work." "Building wider circles of community," writes Nate Olson, "is essential for those of us coming of age in this era of interdependence." He went on to found Voices of Young Americans for Global Engagement (VOYAGE) and its website at [www.voyageweb.org](http://www.voyageweb.org). Old Dominion University, for example, has "front-loaded" this particular issue by requiring all freshmen to take a course on the global environment. In this way, analytical, research and writing skills are developed in the context of a multi-disciplinary approach to a global problem

([http://www.odu.edu/webroot/orgs/AF/Reg/registrar.nsf/files/NewPAGE.pdf/\\$FILE/NewPAGE.pdf](http://www.odu.edu/webroot/orgs/AF/Reg/registrar.nsf/files/NewPAGE.pdf/$FILE/NewPAGE.pdf)). So there are many routes to developing the habits of *multiperspectivalism* and *triangulation* mentioned earlier.

### **Conclusion:**

Is this globalization-based core curriculum realistic? In fact, it is happening all across higher education – but rarely in this coherent fashion. Is it a good idea? Expanding globalization offers a *maximalist* opportunity to make multi-dimensional, future-oriented international education a central perspective in the general education curriculum. This kind of opportunity will not recur again any time soon. Faculty committed to this perspective should press their campus curriculum committee to reshape the core with a global perspective. International education administrators should scour the curriculum to identify courses with these components and give them greater visibility in their publications (e.g., faculty spotlights in international newsletters). Both can argue that any emerging campus-wide core courses have a global

dimension. Both can link such courses with study/research/service-learning/internship abroad. In short, globalization requires a global perspective at the very heart of the liberal education mission. Anything less will fail to fulfill that mission in our time and in our students's lives.

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